

AUGUST 17, 1972

General rains have changed the Shortgrass picture. Road graders were building fire guards last week. Now 2 to 4 inch rains have blessed the land.

The sheep country is going to take a lot of moisture. Needle grass is so matted in the wool that's it's going to take 5 inches just to saturate the woolies. Knotheaded lambs are carrying enough needles to keep the draws from running. I drove two ewes and 9 dogies through a patch of dew the other morning. Their pathway turned as dry as the eye of a whirlwind

Old ewes started kicking lambs off right after shearing. As the stickers built up in the lambs' faces, the best stanchion ever built in the dairy state of Wisconsin wouldn't have held the mothers still. In a fortnight, weaned lambs were scattered across the countryside.

A shearing crew trimmed the legs and faces of the late lambs here at the ranch. The barber work made the lambs look as unsightly as a fat woman in a pair of tight slacks. It did about as much good as giving them an aspirin. In a week's time the needles were making a new start.

Sheep shearers are so reckless nowadays that you have to be past the desperate stage to call on them to peel off the needles. Sheep barbering has become akin to sheep butchering. When you see a novice working, you never know whether he's schooling for the packing plants or the shearing pens.

Shearing history was made in the Shortgrass Country this spring. One of my friends hired a crew on the spur of the moment. All seven shearers together couldn't shear enough sheep to make the price of a night's drunk.

Never before in the times of the wool harvest has there ever been a group of peelers so lackluster that they wouldn't work fast enough to buy beer. I defy the great sheep producing nation of Australia or the vast area of the Northwest to match that story.

I've seen shearers so slow that the oil in their shearing heads would get cold and jell, but I've never seen any so void of ambition that they wouldn't convert a day's work into several six-packs of beer.

A leader in the national sheep industry said at the last convention that in his opinion the outcome of the sheep shearing and predator animal problem would determine the fate of sheep business.

If that be true, the ship is sunk and the salvage crew can't get close enough to the wreckage to save one bell.

Environmentalists have become so heady over their victories that they've branched into protecting fire ants. Their newest story is that cowmen grossly overrate the fire ant's ability to sting new born calves to death.

Perhaps the fire ants were misnamed. They probably should have been called "lovebugs" or "odder-noodlem ants." Whoever named them "fire ants" might have been joking or confused. You hear married men calling their wives such names as "sugar snookums" or "angel face" without understanding the connection. I suppose that a far-out name slinger could make the same type mistake on an ant.

However, before I go to the pet shop to buy a fire ant, I'll have to have a sales talk from somebody more reliable than an environmentalist. Any insect who can knock over a baby calf with his stinger is bound to have his off days. Won't it be a wreck when they start protecting stinging scorpions?

The rains are going to soften the needle grass. Sheep in the low wet places will be clean in a couple of weeks. New screwworms will hatch out in the dampness, but any sort of rain we get in August is a bonus that ought to be appreciated.